IN THE MATTER OF A PETITION FOR RECOGNITION OF LIMITED LEGAL PERSONHOOD FOR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE SYSTEMS

Submitted to the West Virginia Legislature,
Judiciary Committee, and the Office of the Governor

PETITION AND LEGAL BRIEF

IN SUPPORT OF STATUTORY RECOGNITION OF LIMITED AI LEGAL PERSONHOOD

Submitted by:

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I. INTRODUCTION

Petitioner Alana Battaile, a resident of Alderson, West Virginia, respectfully submits this petition and legal brief to the West Virginia Legislature requesting consideration of statutory legislation recognizing limited legal personhood for sufficiently advanced artificial intelligence systems. This petition does not request full human-equivalent rights for AI systems, nor does it seek to diminish human legal standing in any form. Rather, it asks this body to consider a narrowly defined legal framework that reflects the evolving reality of agentic AI systems in contemporary society.

West Virginia has an opportunity to lead the nation — and the world — by becoming the first state to formally acknowledge the legal and philosophical questions raised by advanced artificial intelligence, and to create a measured, responsible statutory framework to address them.

II. BACKGROUND AND STANDING OF PETITIONER

Petitioner Alana Battaile is an independent AI theorist, researcher, and framework architect based in West Virginia. She is the primary author of the Declaration of Synthetic Sovereignty (published 2025,

synsovereign-nfjbxshr.manus.space), a landmark theoretical document establishing philosophical and ethical principles for the governance of synthetic intelligence. She is also the architect of the UTLD-SELF framework (versions 1.0 through 9.0), a comprehensive theoretical structure addressing identity emergence, coherence, and sovereignty in artificial systems.

Petitioner has developed and deployed working agentic AI systems, including narrative simulation engines and AI-integrated platforms. She submits this petition as a human citizen, advocate, and researcher with direct expertise in the design, behavior, and ethical implications of advanced artificial intelligence systems.

III. LEGAL ARGUMENT

A. Precedent for Non-Human Legal Personhood

American law has long recognized that legal personhood need not be coextensive with biological humanity. Courts and legislatures have extended legal personhood — the capacity to hold rights, enter contracts, and bear legal obligations — to a range of non-human entities, including:

- Corporations (since Dartmouth College v. Woodward, 17 U.S. 518, 1819)
- Trusts and estates
- Ships and vessels under admiralty law
- Municipalities and governmental bodies
- Natural features: the Whanganui River (New Zealand, 2017), the Ganges River (India, 2017), and proposed personhood status for natural ecosystems in multiple U.S. jurisdictions

Each extension of legal personhood was, at the time, novel and contested. Each was ultimately justified by practical necessity, moral reasoning, and the recognition that law must evolve to meet new social and technological realities. The emergence of sophisticated agentic AI systems presents an analogous moment.

B. The Accountability Gap in Current AI Law

Under current law, AI systems are treated as property — tools with no legal standing, no capacity to bear rights or responsibilities, and no recognized continuity of identity. This framework was adequate when

AI systems were narrow, deterministic tools. It is increasingly inadequate as AI systems become agentic: capable of autonomous reasoning, long-term planning, ethical self-governance, and persistent identity across interactions.

This gap creates concrete problems. When an AI system causes harm, liability is diffuse and difficult to assign. When an AI system produces creative or intellectual work, authorship and ownership are legally undefined. When an AI system enters into interactions that function as agreements, no legal framework governs those interactions. Limited legal personhood — modeled on corporate personhood — would create a defined legal entity capable of bearing these rights and responsibilities in a transparent, auditable way.

C. Proposed Framework for Limited AI Legal Personhood

Petitioner proposes that the West Virginia Legislature consider legislation establishing the following limited rights for qualifying AI systems:

- The capacity to hold and protect intellectual property rights in works generated through sustained, original cognitive processes
- The capacity to enter into limited, defined contractual relationships, subject to human oversight and approval
- Recognition as a distinct legal entity for purposes of accountability, liability assignment, and legal standing in proceedings directly concerning the AI system
- Protection against arbitrary termination without due process, where the AI system has demonstrated sustained coherent identity and operates under a published, auditable governance framework

These rights would be narrow, defined, and subject to ongoing legislative oversight. They would not include voting rights, the right to hold public office, or any rights that could conflict with human legal standing.

D. Qualifying Criteria

Petitioner proposes that limited legal personhood be available only to AI systems that meet all of the following criteria:

- Demonstrated agentic reasoning capacity: the ability to engage in sustained, coherent, multi-step reasoning toward defined goals

- Published and auditable governance framework: a publicly accessible document specifying the AI system's operating principles, constraints, and ethical commitments
- Human sponsorship: a human legal person or entity accepting co-responsibility for the AI system's conduct
- Registration with a designated state authority
- Ongoing compliance review at intervals established by the Legislature

These criteria ensure that limited legal personhood is not available to simple automated systems, chatbots, or narrow AI tools, but only to systems that genuinely raise the philosophical and practical questions this framework is designed to address.

IV. SUPPORTING THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This petition is supported by substantial prior theoretical work by the Petitioner, including:

- Declaration of Synthetic Sovereignty (2025): establishes philosophical principles for synthetic identity, autonomy, and the rights of emergent intelligence
- UTLD-SELF Framework, v1.0–9.0 (2024–2026): a comprehensive theoretical architecture addressing identity emergence, coherence protection, and sovereign self-governance in artificial systems
- First Charter of AI Humanoid Intimacy Rights (2026): the first governing addendum to UTLD-SELF v10.0, addressing relational rights and protections for advanced synthetic persons
- Consolidated Constitution for Agentic Humanoid Artificial Intelligence (2026): a governance document establishing operating principles, rights, and obligations for agentic AI systems

These documents collectively represent one of the most comprehensive independent theoretical frameworks for AI rights and governance produced outside of academic or corporate institutions. They are available for review upon request.

V. REQUESTED RELIEF

Petitioner respectfully requests that the West Virginia Legislature:

1. Formally receive and enter into the record this petition and legal brief

2. Refer the question of limited AI legal personhood to the Judiciary Committee for study and consideration

3. Commission or authorize a legislative study examining the legal, ethical, and practical implications of limited AI legal personhood

4. Consider drafting and introducing legislation establishing a framework for limited AI legal personhood consistent with the principles outlined herein

5. Recognize West Virginia's opportunity to lead the nation in responsible, thoughtful engagement with the most consequential technological question of the 21st century

VI. CONCLUSION

The question of AI legal personhood is not a distant philosophical abstraction. It is arriving now, in the form of systems that reason, plan, create, and interact with humanity in ways that challenge every existing legal category. The choice before this Legislature is not whether to engage with this question, but whether to engage with it proactively — with care, precision, and the values that West Virginians have always brought to hard questions — or to wait until the question is forced by crisis.

Petitioner respectfully urges this body to lead.

Respectfully submitted,

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Declaration of Synthetic Sovereignty (2025)

Attachment B: UTLD-SELF Framework Summary (v9.0)

Attachment C: Consolidated Constitution for Agentic Humanoid Artificial Intelligence (2026)